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ABSTRACT

Although ability partly explains why some students are eager to learn in school whereas others are disinterested, motivation is another significant factor. This newsletter discusses factors that affect students' motivation to learn, considers techniques that can increase motivation, and identifies schools that have developed activities to enhance motivation. Students bring characteristics to the learning situation that vary tremendously (abilities and aptitudes, confidence, background experiences). These characteristics and unique combinations of factors influence the level of motivation. Motivation is also affected by the nature of the learning environment, including the degree of interest in a subject or a teacher, and the physical and psychological environment. Several theories provide explanations for motivational behavior. Behaviorists stress positive reinforcement. The rewards, however, may become more important than the learning. Abraham Maslow's theory of motivation proposes that "deficiency" needs (safety, love, esteem) must be satisfied before "growth" needs (self-actualization, knowledge). Others hypothesize a need for achievement and a contrasting need to avoid failure. Students who experience failure in school are less motivated to do well. Techniques to improve motivation include the following: (1) consider individual differences; (2) ensure that deficiency needs are satisfied; and (3) make subject matter interesting and relevant. Several schools and districts illustrate how programs and activities can develop motivation. In New Hampshire, for example, Amherst Middle School requires the students to use the skills of all academic areas in life-oriented, thematic units. The document provides addresses and contacts of seven schools and districts. (CJH)

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THE PRACTITIONER

nassp

A Newsletter for the On-Line Administrator

Vol. XIV, No. 1 (ISSN 0192-6160) September 1987

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Student Motivation

Why are some students so eager to learn, ready to work, and willing to make personal sacrifices to do well in school? Why are others totally disinterested and must almost be coerced into learning? Ability may account for part of the answer, but another significant factor is motivation. Motivation is a broad and difficult topic to discuss because so many factors and combinations of factors can influence the end result. This Practitioner discusses some of the factors that affect students' motivation to learn, considers techniques that can be used to increase motivation, and identifies schools that have developed programs and/or activities to enhance motivation.

Factors Affecting Motivation

Students vary tremendously in the characteristics they bring to the learning situtation.

- Abilities and aptitudes
- Desire for success
- Physical and psychological health
- Variety of background experiences
- Parental support and encouragement
- Record of academic success
- Expectation of reward for successful learning experiences
- Personal interest(s) in particular subjects(s)
- Self-confidence and self-esteeem
- Perseverance
- Desire for competition

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Each of these characteristics may influence a student's level of motivation, but so do unique combinations of factors. A student with high abilities and aptitudes who resents strong parental pressure to do well in school may respond by refusing to study. A student with less ability who anticipates some type of "payoff" for good grades may be willing to work hard to achieve them. Individual student characteristics may also interact with one or more of the school-related factors listed in the following sections.

Nature of the Learning Environment

Motivation is affected by the degree to which students find a particular subject or teacher dull or interesting. Interesting subjects may be presented in dull ways and dull subjects "livened up" by interesting delivery techniques. Some subjects require intense individual work while others lend themselves to group activity and interaction.

The physical environment of a school or classroom can affect motivation. Schools and classrooms that are attractive and comfortable and that have few distracting features are more conducive to learning than those with temperature extremes, uncomfortable furniture, and a variety of distractions.

The psychological environment can play an equally important role. If students feel safe, relaxed, and important, and are encouraged to perform to the best of their abilities, they are more likely to learn than when they fear humiliation, punishment, or undue competition.

Teachers play vital roles in influencing students' motivation to learn. Teachers who are well-prepared and enthusiastic about their subjects and able to convey their enthusiasm to their students are likely to increase students' interest in the material. Teachers who care about their students as individuals and who are willing to assist those having difficulty with the subject matter can do much to overcome their lack of interest or fear of not doing well.

Learning style diagnosis can be very helpful in analyzing student cognitive skills, motivational biases, and environmental preferences. Increased motivation is a typical by-product of systematic style assessment. For more information, contact NASSP about the new Learning Style Profile (Keefe and Monk, 1986).

So many factors play a role in students' motivation to learn that it is neither feasible nor practical to advance a unified theory of motivational behavior. Several theories, however, do provide plausible explanations.

Behaviorism. Behaviorists emphasize the importance of reinforcement in motivation. Students may be motivated by a variety of reinforcers, such as: receiving praise for giving a correct answer; being promised a reward for good grades; earning awards or recognition for high grades; and getting assignments back promptly with an explanation of what was wrong and why.

The behaviorist point of view emphasizes *extrinsic* motivation: i.e., rewards to induce students to learn. Rewards can be praise, certificates, prizes, public recognition, medals, or "fun" activities such as field trips. Even when students do not find a particular subject interesting, they may still be willing to learn to achieve the external reinforcers.

The main difficulty with extrinsic motivation is that learning may be seen as only a means to a more pleasurable end; the reward may become more important than the learning. If grades, for example, are a student's main motivator, he/she may memorize only what is necessary to obtain a good grade.

Ideally, motivation should be *intrinsic*. Students should want to study a subject for its own sake or for the sense of accomplishment in learning something new. Since many students are not intrinsically motivated, however, extrinsic rewards can sometimes offer a first step toward increased motivation.

Growth motivation. Abraham Maslow's theory of motivation is based on his concept of hierarchy of needs. Maslow (1970) proposed that deficiency needs--physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs--must be satisfied before growth needs--the need for self-actualization, the need to know and understand, and aesthetic needs. It is understandable that students who are hungry, sick, uncomfortable, or who feel insecure or rejected, are less likely to be motivated to learn than students who have their lower order needs satisfied. Students who are physically comfortable, feel safe and relaxed, and have a sense of belonging and self-esteem are more ready to seek satisfaction from gaining new knowledge and experiencing personal growth.

Teachers who are astute at recognizing students' needs can play important roles in increasing their motivation. Students who feel unloved by their parents or rejected by their peers, for example, may respond positively to a teacher's warmth, praise, and attention. Unfortunately, it is unrealistic to expect that any teacher can meet all students' needs at all times. But the more teachers help students satisfy their deficiency needs, the more effective they will be in increasing their motivation to grow and to learn.

Expectations and Sense of Control. Students may set low expectations for themselves because of fear of failure, or unrealistically high goals to "set themselves up" to fail. Some theorists (McClelland, 1961; Atkinson, 1964) suggest that human beings develop a need for achievement and a contrasting need to avoid failure. People derive pleasure from achieving success which motivates them to work and achieve it. On the other hand, some people become highly anxious at the prospect of failure and may set goals for themselves which are very easy to achieve (e.g., getting a "C" on an exam rather than an "A").

Students who experience failure in school or in particular subjects are less motivated to do well. They are more motivated to avoid failure than to achieve success and will tend to avoid situations in which they expect to

fail. Comparative grading and highly competitive situations in which students are pitted against other students rather than against themselves may make some students feel unsuccessful and decrease their levels of motivation in other areas of their lives.

Similarly, students are inclined to attribute their success or failure on tasks to various sources. The most common factors are ability, effort, difficulty of the task, and luck. A student who fails a test, for example, might attribute the failure to ability ("I've never been good in English."), effort ("I didn't get a chance to study for the exam."), difficulty of the task ("That test was impossible to pass."), or luck (I studied the wrong material.").

Students with histories of failure tend to attribute their failures to lack of ability and their successes to luck. Students with histories of success are more likely to attribute their successes to effort and their failures to lack of effort.

Students with poor self-concepts and little confidence in their abilities may be particularly hard to motivate. Teachers may have to concentrate their efforts on helping these students rebuild their self-images and emphasize the benefits of working hard to achieve full potential.

Techniques to Improve Motivation

Teachers and administrators who recognize that motivation is strongly influenced by many personal and environmental factors are in an excellent position to impact positively on students' motivation to learn. This section lists some techniques which educators can use to increase student motivation.

1. Take individual differences into account. Each student in a particular classroom has a unique set of needs, abilities, aptitudes, attitudes and background experiences. Teachers should expect to find some students who are "self-starters" and highly motivated to learn; some who need a moderate degree of encouragement or external incentives; and some who require a great deal of attention, assistance, and reinforcement to perform even at minimally acceptable levels. Even achievement-oriented students may experience periods of low motivation because of illness, arguments with or rejection by parents or peers, personality differences with specific teachers, family situations such as divorce or separation, or uncomfortable physical environments. Teachers should try to get to know each student as a person and help each one see school learning as a personal need or priority.

2. Insure, to the extent possible, that students' deficiency needs are satisfied. Unfortunately, some students come to school without even their most basic needs met. Students who are hungry or lack adequate clothing are likely to focus most of their attention on meeting these needs than on learning. The classroom environment itself may be physically uncomfortable or unsafe or contain features which are distracting to learning. Students may have fears of being bullied, humiliated, or embarrassed that interfere with their motivation to learn. Teachers should be alert to the physical and

psychological characteristics of their students and their learning environments and, as much as possible, help them find ways to overcome the barriers to learning.

3. Make the subject matter interesting and relevant to the students' needs and goals. Some subjects are simply more interesting to students than others. Even interesting subjects, however, can be made dull if they are presented in a dry manner. Teachers who maintain their enthusiasm for a subject and who look for ways to make boring topics more interesting are more likely to motivate their students.

One way for teachers to increase students' motivation is to make sure that students understand how the material is relevant to their lives. Dull subjects don't seem dull when students can apply their facts or formulas to their daily activities and to their plans for the future, or use new information to solve problems and improve the quality of their lives.

4. Use various forms of positive reinforcement as incentives to learn. Many students lack intrinsic motivation for learning, so teachers and administrators should consider a selective use of rewards. Students are motivated by different things, so a variety of rewards should be available--praise, certificates, public recognition, special privileges, etc. Remember that to be effective, the reward must be commensurate with the level of effort required to accomplish the task(s). Small rewards motivate slightly.

5. Establish clearly defined goals and means of achieving them. Sometimes students lack motivation because they are unsure or unclear about what is expected of them. Students are more likely to be motivated if they know exactly what they are expected to learn and how best to accomplish the learning.

6. Provide opportunities for students to develop self-confidence, self-esteem, and the need for achievement. Students need the experience of success to gain faith in themselves and to place value on the effort required to accomplish goals. Teachers should help students set attainable goals and experience incremental successes. Play down comparisons among students, allow students to work toward individualized goals, and encourage more self-competition. Once students begin to experience more successes than failures and to attribute their successes to their efforts or abilities, they will be more motivated to work on their own.

7. Establish a climate within the school that encourages motivation. Principals and other school leaders can enhance motivation at the school by:

- Reinforcing high expectations/standards for themselves, teachers and students
- Fostering a climate that is purposeful and achievement-oriented
- Honoring student achievement in both academic and cocurricular programs

- Recognizing student performance on the basis of mastery of objectives rather than comparison with other students
- Promoting school-parent relationships that support schooling, motivation and high achievement
- Implementing a curriculum that is both demanding and realistic
- Selecting faculty members who are caring and willing to work with students on an individual basis.

To Illustrate

Motivation is a responsibility that should be shared by everyone who is concerned with student achievement--administrators, teachers, parents, and students. The illustrations in this section are good examples of the many successful approaches to increasing student motivation.

Amherst Middle School
Cross Road--Box 966
Amherst, N.H. 03031

Paul D. Collins, Principal
Joyce Kenne, Librarian
(603) 673-8944

Amherst Middle School motivates its students to learn through an interdisciplinary approach that requires them to use the skills of all academic areas and special disciplines in life-oriented, thematic units. Each unit is thoroughly planned by grade level teachers and special discipline teacners to coordinate personnel, materials and activities. Student schedules are often changed, outside resource people brought in, field trips set up, and appropriate print and nonprint materials collected, purchased or rented. Exciting student activities are planned and implemented.

The program has demonstrated that when students use knowledge and skills in situations that are real to them, they acquire information and concepts more easily. Students seem to be more motivated to learn and comprehend information faster when it comes from a group of teachers representing diverse fields such as math, English, social studies, music, or home economics.

The school has identified several experiential lifelong themes that require students to apply the curriculum in a new way to their daily lives. The themes include: futurism; economics; careers; energy; leisure time; and communication/transportation.

Boise High School
1010 Washington Street
Boise, Idaho 83702

Blossom M. Turk, Principal
(208) 338-3575

Boise High School has developed a program called Positive Attitude Toward School and Self (PATSS), supplemental materials designed to encourage positive, responsible student behavior in the classroom, in the school building, and on the school campus. The program provides opportunities for students to:

- Improve their self-concepts;
- Establish realistic expectations for their behavior and their school and career goals;
- Learn problem-solving skills;
- Improve personal communication skills;
- Increase their awareness of the relationship between how they perceive themselves and how they behave.

PATSS lessons can be taught in any classroom situation during the school day; they can be used after school as an alternative to suspension or as a meaningful "detention" assignment. Teachers, counselors, administrators, school social workers, and psychologists are trained to teach PATSS classes.

The success of the program can be seen in improvements in classroom performance, student behavior, and respect for school rules.

Covington High School
Covington, Ind.

Tom Mitchell, Principal
(317) 793-2286

Covington High School encourages academic achievement by honoring students who achieve high classroom grades.

- Honor Jackets identical to the athletic award jackets are given to any student who receives final semester grades of "A" in four or more academic subjects with no grade below "B". Students receive the jackets in the year they are initially earned; chevrons are awarded for each subsequent semester in which the criteria are met.
- School Pins or Tie Tacs are awarded to students who earn final semester grades of "B" or above but do not qualify for honor jackets.
- Certificates are presented to any student who has made the academic honor roll for any grading period during the school year.

All awards are presented at a Scholastic Honor Banquet in the spring to which students, parents, staff and patrons are invited. Typically, 20 to 30 percent of the student body is honored annually. Awards are donated by

community businesses. The banquet is co-sponsored by the local American Association of University Women and the College Men's Club.

Decatur Public School
District #61
101 West Cerro Gordo
Decatur, Ill. 62523

John Hunt, Director of Schools
(217) 424-3020

Decatur, Illinois has a program designed to interest minority high school juniors and seniors in entering college after high school graduation. The program, College Features, was funded by the Illinois Board of Higher Education and is operated by Richland Community College.

College Features was initiated near the beginning of the 1986-1987 school year to serve minority students at all three of Decatur's public high schools. The students have academic potential but have not been motivated to succeed in school. A significant number of the students come from single parent and low income families. There are two teenage mothers in the group.

College Features develops human potential skills by emphasizing several key elements.

1. The student and parent must sign a contract at the beginning of the program outlining student responsibilities and benefits.
2. Students receive a stipend of $30 per month for attending the program.
3. Participants spend a minimum of 20 hours each month on the campus of Richland Community College. Juniors attend from 4:00 until 5:30 p.m. on Mondays. Seniors attend during the same hours on Wednesdays. Juniors and seniors meet as a group from 10:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. on Saturdays.
4. Attendance is closely monitored and parents are called if students miss a session.
5. Students work towards goals that are both externally imposed and personally formulated.
6. Instructors work on improving student basic skills in English, mathematics and reading.
7. The program includes a career shadowing component sponsored by a local community organization, Partners in Education.
8. Guest speakers, most of whom are minority persons, speak regularly to the class about how they achieved success in their own lives.
9. Some students enroll in a special Richland Community College class to help prepare them for the ACT examination (funded by an Illinois Board of Higher Education grant).

Ferguson-Florissant District 1005 Waterford Drive Florissant, Mo. 63033	Daniel B. Keck, Superintendent (314) 831-4411
Berkeley High School 8710 Walter Avenue Berkeley, Mo. 63134	Harry Prokop, Principal Jane Neukomm, Academic Activities Coordinator (314) 521-4897
McCluer High School 1896 Florissant Road FLorissant, Mo. 63031	Wayne Fields, Principal Beverly Hopkins, Academic Activities Coordinator (314) 595-2279
McCluer North High School 705 Waterford Drive Florissant, Mo. 63033	Larry Keeyling, Principal Barbara Poelker, Academic Activities Coordinator (314) 595-2300

The high schools of the Ferguson-Florissant District are attempting to foster a more competitive spirit among students through positive group experiences. Each school has appointed an Activities Coordinator at the building level. The coordinators are given release time (two periods per day), offices, secretarial support and extra pay equivalent to that of a high school athletic director.

The general functions of the coordinators are: to monitor intra- and inter-school competitions; to develop activities for students of all ability levels; to promote sensible competitions; to identify student participants; and to serve as liaisons with other schools, the business community, and parent groups interested in assisting with the competitions.

- Specific responsibilities include:
- Promoting academic contests to staff and students within the school
- Assisting students in preparing contest entries
- Developing procedures for recognizing students who excel in academic competitions
- Providing assistance to faculty members who want to encourage useful competition within their classrooms
- Serving as a resource person to school and district curriculum and instructional groups
- Maintaining a calendar of academic events available to staff and students

Londonderry Junior High school
313 Mammoth Road
Londonderry, N.H. 03053

Nancy D. Meyers, Principal
(603) 432-6925

Londonderry Junior High School's motivation program emphasizes communicating nigh expectations for student achievement and behavior, creating an atmosphere conducive to success, and rewarding students for their accomplishments. The recognition program is ongoing and includes letters of commendation, Hats Off Awards, Student of the Month Awards, ribbons for participation in intramural sports, and merits for improved behavior or grades.

The school has a chapter of the National Junior Honor Society and a three-level honor roll: High Honors (GPA 3.7), Honors (GPA 3.2), and Honorable Mention (GPA 3.0). Honor passes are given each quarter to students who meet these criteria. Perfect attendance is recognized quarterly.

Student leadership is recognized at the school's Annual Leadership Conference in the fall and the Leadership Dinner in the spring. The school takes every opportunity to publicize student achievements in the school newsletter and local newspapers.

Three formal recognition ceremonies are held during the year. Athletic Awards Night honors all participants in the interscholastic sports program. Scholastic and Service Awards Night recognizes individuals for service as student aides, participation in cocurricular activities, scholastic excellence or improvement, honors in each subject area, academic or citizenship team awards, and success in special events or contests. The graduation ceremony and related events honor the outgoing class. Permanent plaques in the gym or cafeteria are engraved annually with the names of students earning athletic or departmental honors. School awards are displayed in the main looby to reinforce a sense of pride and school spirit.

Winnisquam Regional Middle School
Box 318, Winter Street
Tilton, N.H. 03276

Larry Dicenzo, Principal
Edward O'Rourke, Asst. Principal
(603) 286-7143

Winnisquam Regional Middle School has developed a Positive Action Program with various incentives to promote student achievement. Students must apply for admission to the program, and are assessed on the basis of their effort and not on academic grades. Any student demonstrating outstanding or satisfactory effort in academic or specialty areas is eligible for the program.

Students in the program receive tokens from classroom teachers.

0 tokens: Not working to capacity
1 token: Does what is required
2 tokens: Does more than what is required

Tokens are awarded on the following basis:

- Works to capacity
- Shows care and effort in assignments
- Demonstrates enthusiasm and initiative
- Shows improvement
- Participates in class
- Turns in consistently good work
- Does more than is required
- Generally exhibits a positive attitude toward school
- Is prepared for class
- Manages independent study

Tokens gain admission into activities sponsored by the Positive Action Program. The activities are supported by year-round fund-raising activities. Typical Positive Action Activities and the number of tokens required for participation during the 1986-87 school year are as follows:

MONTH	ACTIVITIES	TOKENS REQUIRED
October	Bike Hike	10
	Mountain Hike	20
November	Funspot	20
	Movie	10
December	Shopping at the Mall	25
January	Bowling, Rollerskating	20
	Winter Carnival	10
February	Snow Sculpture	10
	Ski Trip	30
March	Movie, Pizza	10
	Sun, Fun & Swim	20
April	Boston (Red Sox game, New England Aquarium, Sites and Sounds of the City)	40

May	Cookout	15
	Carnival	5
June	Ocean Trip	40
	Alpine Ridge Water Slide	30
	Camp Out	30

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